A Mormon Bigfoot: David Patten's Cain and the Conception of Evil in LDS Folklore

Matthew Bowman

In the spring of 1835, Apostle David W. Patten claimed he saw Cain. He was serving a mission in Tennessee and staying with the family of Abraham O. Smoot, a future stake president and mayor of Salt Lake City and Provo. Three and a half years later, in October 1838, Patten was killed at the Battle of Crooked River in Missouri. A 1900 biography reprinted a letter Smoot sent to Joseph F. Smith in 1893, reporting Patten's claim that, while riding his mule back to Smoot's home he

> met with a very remarkable personage who had represented himself as being Cain who had murdered his brother, Abel. . . . I suddenly noticed a very strange personage walking beside me . . . for about two miles. His head was about even with my shoulders as I sat in my saddle. He wore no clothing but was covered with hair. His skin was very dark. . . . He [said] that he had no home, that he was a wanderer in the earth. . . . He said that he was a very miserable creature, that he had earnestly sought death . . . but that he could not die, and his mission was to destroy the souls of men. . . . I rebuked him in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by virtue of the Holy Priesthood, and commanded him to go hence and he immediately departed out of my sight.[1]

Patten's story has since become mildly famous, an essential

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piece of Latter-day Saint folklore, and the inspiration for countless campfire tales and at least one full novel.[2] Cain, the first murderer, is a powerful theological symbol of sin in the Western religious tradition. For Mormons, however, he is weighed with a host of roles beyond this. He has been, and sometimes still is, seen as a conscious ally of Satan and father of a cursed race. This second role was muted by the 1978 revelation extending priesthood ordination to all worthy male members, but Cain's changing position in Mormon folklore is still worth examining for the insight it provides into how the Mormon mind has dealt with these issues over the course of its history.

Patten's story persisted within Mormonism into the twentieth century. In the Fife Folklore Archives at Utah State University are numerous stories of encounters with Cain, prefaced with statements such as that offered by a Brigham Young University student in 1972, who "said that he heard this story from a religion teacher on the B.Y.U. campus. He said the teacher told it as a true story." Another story, collected from a Salt Lake City Deseret Book employee in 1980 begins, "Several people have told me that Cain is still alive. They are actually teaching it in some Seminary classes here [in Salt Lake City]." A BYU anthropology student in the 1970s reported hearing the Patten story told as fact by his grandfather. Even Spencer W. Kimball, former president of the Church, recounted Patten's story as fact in his *The Miracle of Forgiveness*—a book now regarded as a Mormon classic and still widely read more than thirty years after its publication. In his retelling, Kimball noted that Cain's fate—as the cursed being himself recounted it to Patten—should serve as a warning about the plight of those whose sins are heinous enough to prove unforgivable.[3]

Of course, many Mormons in the late twentieth century would listen to Patten's story with skepticism; even the Deseret Book em-

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[1]Cited in Lycurgus A. Wilson, *The Life of David W. Patten, The First Apostolic Martyr* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Press, 1900) 45–47.

[2]Seth Lester, *Clan of Cain* (Bangor, Maine: Booklocker, 2001) or online at http://www.booklocker.com/books/395.html (accessed May 2005); printout in my possession.

[3]Folk Collection 8a, Group 7: Box 3, 1.1.4.3.9.1, 1.1.4.3.7.1, and 1.1.4.3.5.1, Fife Folklore Archives, Special Collections, Merrill-Cazier Library, Utah State University, Logan (hereafter Fife Archives); Spencer W. Kimball, *The Miracle of Forgiveness* (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1969), 127–28.

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ployee above denied believing her seminary teacher's tale. But that has not stopped it from circulating; new variations continued to appear in the Utah State and BYU archives into the 1990s. Clearly, the story has gripped the Latter-day Saint imagination;, and its transformations—both because of and in spite of increased skepticism—can teach us something about the changing Mormon worldview. Today there is a common point to many of the stories. As a tale told by a BYU student in 1990 began, "Did you guys know that Bigfoot is really Cain?"[4] In a 2003 article discussing Utah folklore, the *Deseret News* (Salt Lake City) noted that "the Bigfoot/Cain idea originated in 1980 following apparent Bigfoot sightings in South Weber" in February of that year.[5] Indeed, in various legends, Cain is described as being "covered in hair," "bigger than anybody he'd ever seen before," "a big, hairy creature" and so forth.[6] In the most recent folklore, even if Cain is not explicitly identified as Bigfoot, the features in common are emphasized (hairiness, animal-like) rather than such supernatural characteristics as the curse or demonic intent that Patten stressed.

The conflation of these two legends is a study in the transformation of Mormon culture as reflected in its folklore. Its simplest lesson is that skepticism about the veracity of such tales can be interpreted as declining belief in physical manifestations of supernatural evil. However, the content of Cain stories reflects more subtle changes. The reidentification of Cain as Bigfoot demonstrates how Cain has come to be identified with the mainstream legendary figure; in the process, he is stripped of his spiritual status as an intelligent, malevolent agent of supernatural evil, a presence accepted, and even expected, in nineteenth-century Mormon life. Further, this dehumanization of Cain reflects the weakening grip of the "curse of Cain" folk doctrine that associated him with the stigmatized African race. In these ways the uncoupling of Cain and the demonic is indicative of a larger process of cultural assimilation and transformation.

The layering of a culturally or religiously specific element such as Mormonism's Cain upon a more widely known folk legend such as Bigfoot is not a unique event. In his study of Three Nephites legends,

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[4]Folk Collection 8a, Group 2: Box 12, 1.8.1.21.1, Fife Archives.

[5]Lynn Arave, "Living in Utah," *Deseret News,* July 24, 2003, A-1.

[6]The first is David Patten's, in Wilson, *The Life of David W. Patten,* 45. The second is from Folk Collection 8a, Group 7: Box 3, 1.1.4.3.5.1, Fife Archives. The last is from Folk Collection 8, Box 73, 01–041, Fife Archives.

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folklorist Hector Lee noted that new developments in the legend cycle were largely "apocryphal . . . added by the folk themselves." Rather than emerging from Mormon-specific doctrine or culture, they were increasingly homogenous with American culture, reflecting the motifs and, most importantly, lessons of nationally popular urban legends. Lee asked rhetorically, "How much non-Mormon traditional lore can [the stories] absorb and still remain Nephite [or Mormon] stories?" The answer, as the Cain/Bigfoot stories demonstrate, is quite a lot. Lee argued that the unique aspects of Mormon legendry would wither as the line between American and LDS cultures grew increasingly blurry, as signaled by the absorption of non-Mormon motifs. Folklorist William A. Wilson, however, has demonstrated that quite the opposite has occurred. He points out that the Three Nephites legends have persisted and adapted even as the insularity of Mormon community has faded. Indeed, the story has proved strong enough to absorb in its entirety the much better-known legend of the vanishing hitchhiker, a phantom picked up on the side of the road by an unwary driver only to disappear from the backseat. When encountered by a Mormon in the tale, the phantom becomes a Nephite who utters some Mormon-specific warning. Thus, though the structure reflects generic American legendry, the content remains Mormon.[7]

I would argue that the assimilation of non-Mormon lore into Mormon legend demonstrates the vitality, not the stagnation, of Mormon folklore; it is a strength rather than the weakness Lee saw. As Wilson argues, these stories, even in their modern form, "tell us of a personal God concerned with our individual problems." They teach of the continuing relevance of the spiritual in everyday life. The persistence within transformation of the supernatural figure of Cain is consistent with this argument; combined with such stories as the Nephite/hitchhiker legends, it demonstrates that Mormon folklore is strong enough to maintain a worldview in which the basic supernatural elements of the faith play an essential role. Though Cain's nature, role, and identity have changed, placing such a biblical figure in the essentially secular Bigfoot tale is a

[7]Hector Lee, *The Three Nephites: The Substance and Significance of the Legend in Folklore* (Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1949) 56–57; William A. Wilson, "Freeways, Parking Lots, and Ice Cream Stands: The Three Nephites in Contemporary Society," *Dialogue: A Journal of Mormon Thought* 21, no. 3 (Autumn 1986): 14–25.

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prime example of what Jan Brun- vand calls "the Bible of the folk," story cycles that extend the sacred territory of scripture into such seemingly secular topics as the anatomy (the male "Adam's apple" is a piece of the forbidden fruit stuck in Adam's throat) and botany (certain trees are cursed for providing the material of Christ's cross).[8] This shift—the preservation of the basic supernaturalism of Patten's tale despite a process of adaptation— has allowed Cain's earlier demonic and racist meanings to fade.

The easiest thing to overlook about Patten's story, yet the most important not to forget, is that it was believed. The only written description of the event is Smoot's letter as reprinted in Wilson's biography. Smoot was responding to an inquiry by Joseph F. Smith, then a member of the First Presidency. Smoot fills his story with details, remembering the exact date and that it was "just twilight" when Patten returned. Clearly, Smith had heard the story and was intrigued enough to investigate, while the letter makes it clear that Smoot believed it to be fact. After receiving this letter, Smith relayed its contents to the Quorum of the Twelve. Apostle Abraham H. Cannon commented that he had "always entertained the idea that Cain was dead" but now changed his views. All three men, it appears, took the story seriously.[9]

Even before Smoot's letter, Eliza R. Snow wrote a poem in 1884 describing Cain:

> As seen by David Patten, he was dark
> When pointing at his face of glossy jet
> Cain said, "You see the curse is on me yet."
> The first of murderers, now he fills his post
> And reigns as king o'er all the murd'rous host.[10]

She read this poem at a gathering of Church leaders and Snow relatives celebrating the birthday of Eliza's brother Lorenzo, then a

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[8]Jan Brunvand, *The Study of American Folklore* (New York: Norton, 1968), 88. Dogwood and fig trees are both associated with the cross.

[9]Quoted in Wilson, *The Life of David W. Patten,* 45; "Diary Excerpts of Abraham H. Cannon," Thursday, November 9, 1893, L. Tom Perry Special Collections and Manuscripts, Harold B. Lee Library, Brigham Young University, Provo, Utah (hereafter Perry Special Collections).

[10]Eliza R. Snow Smith, *The Family Record of Lorenzo Snow* (Salt Lake City: Deseret News Company, 1884), 475.

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member of the First Presidency. Her casual mention of Patten's encounter implies that the occurrence was known—and more, accepted—by the audience for whom she wrote fifty years after Patten's experience.

The Cain described by Patten and Eliza Snow, condemned by God, reigning in hell, and walking the earth, reflected religious assumptions of nineteenth-century Mormons. Philip L. Barlow has argued that Mormons of this period shared common Protestant assumptions of biblical literalism; Cain's curse was therefore taken seriously and wedded with a more distinctive belief in what Brigham Young termed "spiritual warfare," a supernatural struggle waged between good and evil over the well-trodden battleground of everyday life. As historian Paul Reeve has argued, the concept of a "spiritual battle between the forces of good and evil [was] manifest in nineteenth-century Mormon theology." Nineteenth-century Mormon leaders embraced a Pauline conception of sin that identified evil as an external force, existing independently of God. A malignant, personified power, it threatened to grip humanity. Mormon leaders described this evil in tangible detail, moving the struggle out of the abstract and into the physical reality of everyday life. Supernatural conflict was for these men neither a metaphor nor very distant; indeed, leaders took care to bring it home to every Saint. Joseph Smith described the armies of Satan as "wicked men and angels of devils and all the infernal powers of darkness" that sought to destroy the Church, and with whom the Saints must be constantly "warring the Christian warfare." Young claimed that "every person who desires and strives to be a Saint is closely watched by fallen spirits . . . they are visiting the human family with various manifestations."[11]

Moreover, these struggles were not to be understood as mere temptation to sin. Rather, they could be very physical, even involving

[11]Philip Barlow, *Mormons and the Bible* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991), 220–29; Joseph Smith Jr. et al., *History of the Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints,* edited by B. H. Roberts, 2d ed. rev. (6 vols., 1902–12, Vol. 7, 1932; rpt., Salt Lake City: Deseret Book, 1980 printing), 5:141; Brigham Young, September 1, 1859, *Journal of Discourses,* 26 vols. (London and Liverpool: LDS Booksellers Depot, 1854–86), 7:237; W. Paul Reeve, "'As Ugly as Evil' and 'As Wicked as Hell': Gadianton Robbers and the Legend Process among the Mormons," *Journal of Mormon History* (Fall 2001): 132. On Paul's conception of sin as an external force rather than a

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hand-to-hand combat. Heber C. Kimball told rapt Utah audiences about "legions of wicked spirits . . . as plain as I now see you, and they came as near to me as you now are. . . . They came to me as I was laying hands upon Brother Russell, the wicked spirits got him to the door of the room." Kimball added that, when he shared these experiences with Joseph Smith, the Prophet "told me that he had contests with the devil, face to face. He also told me how he was handled and afflicted by the devil, and said, he had known circumstances where Elder Rigdon was pulled out of bed three times in one night."[12] Jedediah Grant told listeners that Joseph Smith was given "revelations showing him the power of Lucifer, the opposite of good, that he might be aware of the strength of his opponent."[13] The physical nature of supernatural evil, a feature largely absent in today's church, provided Patten's story of Cain with an audience whose worldview was pre- pared to accept it.

Indeed, the leaders of the early Church seemed to revel in such spiritual battles. "When the kingdom of God is on the earth," announced Jedediah Grant, "you may expect to see a special display or manifestation of the opposite to the Gospel. . . . Then the priesthood of the devil may be seen operating, for he has got one."[14] The Saints, perhaps, were pleased with the idea that they had brought Satan from hiding; it meant that the kingdom was rising as it should. Upon offering an oration over the cornerstone of the Salt Lake Temple in 1853, John Young said, "I very well know that, at the commencement of the Temples that have heretofore been built in the name of the Lord, by this people, the devil has always moved his artillery with greater power and activity at that time. . . . I pray that we shall all feel nerved up with power to accomplish the great and glorious work we are called to perform."[15] David Patten's Cain provided the Saints with a clear and definable supernatural antagonist, thus, perhaps paradoxically, underscoring the truth of the work that Cain sought to destroy.

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human action, see, for example, "Before the law was given, sin was in the world" (Rom. 5:13) and "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate to do . . . it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me" (NIV Rom. 7:15–17). See also Leon Morris, *The Epistle to the Romans* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1988), 190–92.

[12]Heber C. Kimball, March 2, 1856, *Journal of Discourses,* 3:229–30.

[13]Jedediah M. Grant, February 19, 1854, *Journal of Discourses,* 2:10.

[14]Ibid., 2:12.

[15]John Young, April 6, 1853, *Journal of Discourses,* 2:40.

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Indeed, one of the most famous and best-documented encounters with Cain explicitly placed him in the role that John Young described. E. Wesley Smith, a son of Joseph F. Smith and Julina Lambson Smith, was president of the Hawaii Mission in 1921 when the temple at Laie was dedicated. The night before the dedication, Smith had a strange visitor. According to his own account:

> A man came through the door. He was tall enough to have to stoop to enter. His eyes were very protruding and rather wild looking, his fingernails were thick and long. He presented a rather unkempt appearance and wore no clothing at all. . . . There suddenly appeared in [Smith's] right hand a light which had the size and appearance of a dagger. . . . A voice said "This is your priesthood." He commanded the person in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ to depart. . . . Immediately when the light appeared the person stopped and on being commanded to leave, he backed out the door.[16]

A shaken Wesley contacted his brother, Apostle Joseph Fielding Smith, who identified the apparition as "Cain . . . whose curse is to roam the earth seeking whom he may destroy." Joseph Fielding then echoed John Young's themes almost verbatim, describing Cain as a representative of "the spirit of the adversary" of which there was "always unusual evidence . . . for a period just prior to the dedication of every temple." As a final touch, Joseph directed his brother to "a little book written by Lycurgus A. Wilson on the life of David W. Patten" for further investigation into the matter.[17] Here, then, is perhaps the traditional Mormon image of Cain—a physical presence on the earth, an incarnation of supernatural evil sent by Satan, whose primary role was to undo the work of the Church.

Indeed, the motif of Cain attempting to disrupt the work of the Saints is echoed throughout the legends. One 1984 tale spoke of an unnamed apostle from the 1920s whose car had broken down while he was in Mexico "checking up on the mission there." While walking through the desert to find help, the apostle encountered "a very large man about 7 feet tall and very dark and harry [sic] coming towards him. . . . The Apostle asked him who he was. This man said he was

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[16]"Experiences with Cain," n.d., MSS 5273, Archives, Family and Church History Department, Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, Salt Lake City (hereafter LDS Church Archives).

[17]Ibid.

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Caine [sic] . . . [and tried] to over power [the Apostle, but] . . . the Apostle cast him out with the authority of the Priesthood."[18] Another story, collected in 1961, described

> a devout young man who had just recently been called to the office of Bishop. One evening while this man was working late into the night he began to feel as if something was wrong. . . . A monstrous tall dark figure covered with black hair walked in [to his office]. . . . This figure had the appearance of what one would think Cain to have had. . . . The Bishop had the feeling that its intent was to destroy him. . . . He called out "By the authority of the priesthood and the power of God I command you to leave!"[19]

Both stories have very similar motifs: A dedicated servant of the Lord is pursuing his Church calling when Cain interrupts him and seeks to destroy him. And as one might expect, mission officials and missionaries seem to be the most frequent target for Cain; aside from more prominent mission workers like our unnamed apostle, E. Wesley Smith, and David Patten himself, ordinary and often unnamed missionaries have been plagued by Cain as well. One story from the 1970s tells of "two boys from the Bear River Valley who had just received their mission calls. . . . While they were riding they saw a big hairy creature. It spooked their horses. . . . They went to their stake president. . . . He then told them it was Cain." Another story, collected in 1998, describes a giant "Cain-beast which chased two elders to their car."[20]

The ease with which E. Wesley Smith, the bishop, and the apostle dispatched Cain is a common nineteenth-century theme in stories of spiritual warfare; in these tales, God's power in the form of the Church leader is pitted directly against Satan's in the form of Cain, and God triumphs. Similarly, Cain presented little resistance to David

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[18]Folk Collection 8a, Group 7: Box 3, 1.1.4.3.10.1, Fife Archives.

[19]Folk Collection 8a, Group 7: Box 3, 1.1.4.3.2.1, Fife Archives.

[20]Folk Collection 8, Box 73: 01–041, Lisa Larson, collector, Fife Archives; "A Night at the Canyon," Whitney Belcher, collector, Wilson Folklore Archives 2204, Perry Special Collections. Interestingly, although the physical manifestations of evil in everyday life that Young and Smith spoke of seem to have largely departed from day-to-day Church life, the mission field remains one area in which such legends can still be found. See William A. Wilson's examples of black horsemen and demonic possession in "On Being Human: The Folklore of Mormon Missionaries," *New York Folklore* 8, nos. 3/4 (Winter 1982): 5–27.

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Patten. When that apostle commanded him "in the name of Jesus Christ and by the virtue of the Holy priesthood" to leave, Cain "immediately departed out of my sight."[21] Both the apostle and bishop also banished Cain by invoking their priesthood authority. In these stories, Cain has an important function in Mormon culture. He is represented as a player on the distinctly Mormon battleground of Joseph Smith's restoration and is understood through the sacred history that Mormonism wrote for itself.

These tales communicate the overt supernatural conflict between Cain and the power of God. However, other tales complicate these tidy narratives, for in Mormon folklore, Cain is not just any demon. Perhaps the single most frequent use of the word *Cain* in the legends and folk doctrine of the LDS Church has been his association with the "curse" of dark skin, a mark of spiritual inferiority, and, until 1978, the inability of his male presumed descendants to be ordained to the priesthood. Patten's story, Snow's poem, and several of the other stories discussed so far use "dark" or, less frequently, "black" to describe Cain's physical appearance. Describing Cain as the progenitor of a cursed race is another way in which Mormon folklore has used Cain to explain evil to itself.

A case in point is the following tale, retold by folklorists William Wilson and Richard Poulson: "Missionaries tracting . . . a white section of a town in Georgia were surprised when a huge black Negro came to the door and hurled obscenities at them. His mein [sic] was hideous, and the missionaries left, much frightened. Their mission president later told them that the man had been Cain, that the town was very wicked, and that they should no longer labor there."[22]

This story presents a number of variants from the pattern. First, the protagonists uncharacteristically back down when confronted by "Cain." Even the authority figure of the mission president seems to retreat. In the story of the two Bear Lake missionaries on horseback, the stake president identified the dangerous figure for them; but that earlier story ended at that point, leaving the impression that in naming Cain, the stake president has seized control of the situation. The implication is that the two missionaries fulfilled their missions despite Cain's efforts.

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[21]Wilson, "Life of David W. Patten," 47.

[22]William A. Wilson and Richard Poulson, "The Curse of Cain and Other Stories: Blacks in Mormon Folklore," *Sunstone,* November/December 1980, 16.

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In the Georgia tale, however, naming Cain almost seems a surrender to him. Perhaps it was meant to, given the strong racial overtones in this story. The specifics of "Negro" and "Georgia" imply race more strongly than any other tale examined for this study. Perhaps the surrender to Cain reflected the Church's struggle during the civil rights movement when the story was collected—a period of awkward transition when the Church was confronting its own racial assumptions.

Undeniably, the association of darkness/blackness with evil has ancient roots, far older than Mormonism. In early America, the Puritans called the devil that haunted them the "Black Man."[23] However, it is also true that the Mormon belief system, which typically develops theology and pseudo-theology to explain virtually every practice or speculation,[24] has produced a number of theories that not only associate a dark-skinned Cain with evil, but also with the African race, widely believed to be his descendants.[25] John Taylor, third president of the Church, preached in 1881 that Cain's descendants were preserved through the flood because "it was necessary that the devil should have a representation on Earth as well as God," language

[23]Timothy McMillan, "Black Magic, Witchcraft, Race, and Resistance in Colonial New England," *Journal of Black Studies* 25, no. 1 (September 19940: 94-117, esp. 107-8, where he discusses Satan as black. Nathaniel Hawthorne uses the term in the same way in *The Scarlet Letter* (Boston: Ticknor, 1850), 92.

[24]Mark Leone, *The Roots of Modern Mormonism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1979), 168. Leone calls Mormonism a "do-it-yourself theology," saying that, "Mormons create their own theology and philosophy in the literal sense, and in the context of the church they work out for themselves most of the problems faced in life." Leone's argument that members adapt general theology to deal with specific situations fits how Cain folklore has been adapted to changing cultural emphases.

[25]For this association identifying Cain as ancestor of the black race, see David Goldenberg, *The Curse of Ham:Race and Slavery in Early Judaism, Christianity, and Islam* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2003), and Stephen Haynes, *Noah's Curse:The Biblical Justification of American Slavery* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002). Both works note the conflation that nineteenth-century Americans made between Cain's curse and that of Noah's cursed son Ham, whose descendents were deemed children of Cain and ancestors of Africans.

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clearly implicating Africans and African Americans.[26] Associations like Taylor's clearly link Cain's identity as the first black man to the traditional depiction of Cain as the adversary's representative. Both represent a challenge to the work of God. Cain's dark skin is a supernatural brand, a mark of the demonic.

In folk beliefs, this motif was worked out in both directions. Wilson and Poulson note, "One of the stories current among nineteenth century Mormons was that when people apostatized from the church, their skin darkened." Conversely, "some tales tell us that when blacks join the Church their skin lightens." This is merely David Patten banishing Cain in more generalized language; black skin in the stories described here is as much a sign of a tangible source of opposition to the work of God as is an appearance of Cain himself.[27]

The resurrection of Cain in the folklore of Mormondom, then, has been a complicating factor for a religion often unsure how to deal with converts of African descent. The presentation of Cain as being not merely the long-past forefather of a "cursed" race, but as a supernatural, demonic figure, currently present and actively hostile to the Church's ongoing growth, has emphasized and reinforced sentiments of fear and racism, strengthening the image of Africans as not only the descendants of the first murderer but as somehow inherently evil due to that association. The Cain of the stories is often monstrous and occasionally pitiable (particularly in Patten's account), but almost always he is presented as more demon than man, twisted by evil, unredeemably subhuman, and, as he told David Patten, "a very miserable creature . . . [who] could not die," though he sought death. In other words, Cain is beyond salvation. It is a profoundly negative image, and one that cannot avoid damaging how the Church and its members interact with those it has associated with Cain.

Is this association changing? There is, perhaps, evidence that it is, following the social and cultural transitions that have occurred since the 1978 revocation on the priesthood ban for men of African descent. Ironically, Cain's monstrous image may have sparked his transformation in folklore from the archetypical cursed first murderer to Bigfoot, more animal than man and lacking the theological associations with nineteenth-century Mormon demonology. Though the Cain-as-Bigfoot stories seldom rehabilitate Cain's image (he is still

[26]John Taylor, August 28, 1881, *Journal of Discourses,* 22:304.
[27]Wilson and Poulson, "Curse of Cain," 14.

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hostile), the emphasis shifts. The older stories, up through the third quarter of the twentieth century, stress Cain's curse. He often speaks, identifying himself as Cain and describing himself as unable to die or as a vagabond. An agent of Satan, he must be driven off by priesthood power. In contrast, newer legends—those gathered in the 1980s and 1990s—deemphasize elements like the curse and supernatural evil, instead stressing the more mundane horror of a bestial but not supernatural Bigfoot. Cain now rarely speaks; his specific mission to destroy the Church has become the general hostility that one would expect from a wild animal, and the theme of supernatural confrontation has faded. In these newer tales, perhaps not coincidentally, events in American folklore in general, and in Mormon country in specific, that surrounded the 1978 revocation of the priesthood ban provided the legend cycle with a new template.

In October 1967, a man named Roger Patterson filmed thirty seconds of eight-millimeter footage near Bluff Creek in northern California. The film shows a large, heavy, hair-covered creature loping away from the camera. At one point, it turns and stares into the lens before vanishing into the forest. As prominent Bigfoot researcher John Green argues, the film "changed everything." Older stories of Bigfoot, Green notes, spoke of "hairy wild men," and often "don't make a clear division between the 'real' and the 'supernatural.'"[28] Indeed, students of Bigfoot lore regularly trace the beast's ancestry back to such beings as Grendel of *Beowulf,* the Green Man of medieval legends, and the Wendigo and skinwalkers of Native American lore.[29] Thus, though the precision of Patten's identification of Cain was unusual, Cain's paranormal aura (monstrous, sinister, diabolical) is fully characteristic of Bigfoot stories from both the nineteenth and twent- ieth century.

A good example is that recounted by future president Theodore Roosevelt in his 1893 *Wilderness Hunter.* Roosevelt referred to it as a "goblin-story" he heard from an old hunter named Bauman, a window into the world of "spectres, and the formless evil beings that haunt the forest depths, and dog and waylay the lonely wanderer." In Roosevelt's recounting, Bauman and a companion, while traveling through the

[28]John Green, "The Historical Overview and Basic Facts Involved in the Bigfoot or Sasquatch Investigation," *Journal of Scientific Exploration* 18, no. 1 (2004): 37–53.

[29]On Bigfoot "ancestors," see Robert Michael Pyle, *Where Bigfoot Walks: Crossing the Dark Divide* (New York: Houghton Mifflin, 1995), 3–8.

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"primeval forest" were ambushed by a huge, fanged, hair-covered "monstrous assailant" who "buried its teeth in his [the companion's] throat. It had not eaten the body, but apparently had romped and gambolled around it in uncouth, ferocious glee, occasionally rolling over and over it; and had then fled back into the soundless depths of the woods." Roosevelt speculated on the identity of "this half human or half devil, some great goblin-beast," but without proposing an identity.[30]

Given the impact of the Patterson film, however, John Green and other observers argue that a parallel understanding of Bigfoot has emerged—scientific, rather than supernatural. Loren Coleman, who wrote the foreword to *The Bigfoot Casebook Updated,* maintained that the publication of Janet and Colin Bord's *The Bigfoot Casebook* (1982) solidified a trend that "put hominology back on track." "Hom- inology" is Coleman's term for the scientific study of Bigfoot and other bipedal primates such as the yeti—a nearly forty-year trend that has reshaped the course of Bigfoot mythology in America.[31]

For many, Bigfoot remains what he always was—a sometimes-supernatural monster with the frightful characteristics Roosevelt described; but scientific language has begun to seep into the legends. Recent titles are revealing: *Big Footprints: A Scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch* and *A Field Guide to the Sasquatch.*[32] The quasi-scientific "Sasquatch" is gaining on the more popular term "Bigfoot." Green enthusiastically comments that "Sasquatch" implies a more serious attitude than "Bigfoot." He cites several conclusions about Bigfoot that can be drawn from recent study. He is, for example, nocturnal, omnivorous, and solitary. Though most sightings report "bluffing or threatening" behavior, "only a very few" describe actual injury. Most importantly, Green concludes, Bigfeet are "not some kind of

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[30]Theodore Roosevelt, *The Wilderness Hunter* (New York: Putnam, 1893), 273, 279, 281–82.

[31]Loren Coleman, "The Bigfoot Casebook: A Classic Renewed for the Ages," foreword to Janet and Colin Bord, *The Bigfoot Casebook Updated: Sightings and Encounters from 1818–2004* (Enumclaw, Wash.: Pinewoods Press, 2005), n.p.

[32]Grover Krantz, *Big Footprints: A Scientific Inquiry into the Reality of Sasquatch* (Boulder, Colo.: Johnson Books, 1992); David Gordon, *A Field Guide to Sasquatch* (Seattle, Wash.: Sasquatch Books, 1992).

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wild humans" but are animals to be studied like any other species.[33]

Supporting Coleman and Green, folklorist Linda Milligan also notes a recent decline of old-style stories that associated Bigfoot (inappropriately, researchers like Green believe[34]) with UFOs. Indeed, Milligan argues for the influence "of the published debate on the thinking of active bearers of the legend." Bigfoot researchers, she claims, have drawn the popular legend toward naturalism through emphasizing the importance of evidence–footprints, pieces of hair, physical descriptions, and the like.[35]

A Utah example illustrates these emerging trends in a Mormon context. On Sunday afternoon, February 3, 1980, a South Weber, Utah, a high school student named Pauline Markham glanced out of her kitchen window and saw what she identified as "a big, black creature" climbing down a mountain ridge a half-mile away. Markham, a Mormon, reported that she simply put her glass down and "went to church." Early the next morning, her cousin, Ronald Smith, who was with his horse in a field, saw a "big dark figure." Smith fled into the house, leaving an agitated horse in the pasture. The next morning, odd tracks in the snow had been trampled by hoofprints.[36]

Jay Barker, an Ogden *Standard-Examiner* reporter, who claimed to have encountered Bigfoot three years earlier, followed up. Although both Markham and Barker were practicing Mormons (presumably Smith was as well), no one apparently associated Bigfoot with Cain. Indeed, all seem to have taken a completely naturalistic approach. Smith compared the sound made by the creature he encountered to a "cougar." Barker speculated that sightings faded because Bigfoot "returned to the mountains with its young." He spoke of the "paw prints" that it left. He initially "thought he was looking at an

[33]Green, "The Historical Overview and Basic Facts," 37–38.

[34]Ibid.

[35]Linda Milligan, "The 'Truth' about the Bigfoot Legend," *Western Folklore* 49 (1990): 83–98, esp. 83.

[36]For Markham and Smith's encounters, see Linda Milligan, "The 'Truth' about the Bigfoot Legend," *Western Folklore* 49 (1990): 83–98, esp. 83. See also John Harrington, "Did Bigfoot Visit Small Davis Town? Citizens Buzz," *Ogden Standard-Examiner,* February 12, 1980, http://www.bfro.net/gdb/show_article.asp?id=193 (accessed May 2007), print-out in my possession.

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elk."[37] Three years earlier, another Ogden man, Sterling Gardner, compared what he believed to be the stench of Bigfoot, which agitated his dogs, to a "skunk."[38]

However, by 1990, local historian Lee D. Bell noted in retrospect that South Weber citizens had begun associating "their" Bigfoot with Cain soon after these sightings.[39] Twenty-three years after the initial sightings, the *Deseret News* in 2004 pinpointed these South Weber sightings as the genesis of what it called "the Bigfoot/Cain idea."[40] Of course, it is always wise to exercise caution when speculating about turning points in legend cycles, particularly when they are so specific in time and place. However, whether the South Weber sightings did or did not, in fact, drive changes in Cain folklore, the motifs of these encounters illustrate a new path in the legend cycle. They followed the Church's repudiation of Cain's priesthood curse, and the naturalistic explanations that are now their dominant feature has re-visioned Cain: still a monster, perhaps, but one stripped of the supernatural qualities that defined him to Patten and storytellers of his tradition.

Stories gathered during the 1990s for the folklore archives at BYU and Utah State University stress the features that make Cain into Bigfoot rather than those that might make Bigfoot into Cain. That is, they emphasize Cain's "big hairy" appearance, describe him in terms appropriate for animals, and make him less a tormented, cursed soul and more bestial. Encounters no longer have elements of a purposeful confrontation between the demonic and the divine and instead generally end with one or both running away. Here is a representative modern story, collected in 1997: "A group of Boy Scouts was on a camping trip when they heard strange noises. It was Cain, who chased them through the woods and into a cabin. They locked the door, but Cain tried to climb through the chimney. . . . The boys prayed, then got the idea to light a fire in the fireplace. The boy who lit the fire saw

[37]Ibid.

[38]Bert Strand, "8 Hikers Spot Elusive Bigfoot in High Uintahs," *Ogden Standard-Examiner,* August 25, 1977, http://www.bfro.net/gdb/ show_article.asp?id=272 (accessed May 2007).

[39]Lee D. Bell, *South Weber: The Autobiography of One Utah Community* (Salt Lake: K/P Printing, 1990), 513–20. See also Monte Whaley, "Legend of Bigfoot May Be All South Weber Has Left," *Salt Lake Tribune,* April 6, 1996, B-1.

[40]Arave, "Living in Utah," A-1.

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a big hairy man's face in the fireplace right before it went up in flames. Later they saw Cain running across the field yelping in pain."[41]

This story embodies the main elements of the newer legends. Cain's identity is a given, not a question. His activities are those of a natural predator: his seemingly motiveless pursuit, his roof-climbing, and his "yelping" as he ran off. He has stopped being a supernatural emissary of Satan. Indeed, though the prayer in the story seems to offer a ready-made doorway into the traditional confrontation between priesthood power and the forces of evil that characterizes almost every earlier story, the Scouts do not invoke priesthood but light a fire—a practical, rational defense against an animal suitable for a less demon-haunted age. Furthermore, Cain is described solely as "big [and] hairy," without the usual third qualifier—black.

Other stories develop several of these themes. A 1998 tale tells of a giant "Cain-beast," a phrase that emphasizes the brutish nature of this legend's Cain, who, with no attempt at communication, simply "chased two elders to their car." Another collected in the same year tells of Cain stalking an old man's farmhouse late at night. It emphasizes Cain's monstrousness, since "two horses . . . died in the night from heart attacks because they were so afraid." For his part, Cain reacts like any other predator, fleeing when the panicked animals awaken the farmer. In another story, the teller's grandfather looked out his window late at night and "saw a big huge hairy man looking in at him." The grandfather immediately closed the blinds. Reopening them a few moments later, he "saw a huge hairy beast running across his fields. He believed this man to be Bigfoot." Interestingly, the teller introduced the story as his "grandfather's experience with Bigfoot/Cain," but the text itself does not.[42] This is a particularly good example of the growing interchangeability of the two figures in modern versions of the legend.

Furthermore, Cain's new activities (frightening horses and running through fields) seem far less malicious than the figures who intruded upon David Patten or E. Wesley Smith. Indeed, they are strik-

[41]"Supernatural Religious Legends," 1.1.4.3.14.1, Wilson Folklore Archives, Perry Special Collections.

[42]Folk Collections 8, Box 73: 01-041, Lisa Larson, collector, Fife Archives; "A Night at the Canyon," Whitney Belcher, collector, Wilson Folklore Archives, 1–2204, Perry Special Collections.

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ingly reminiscent of Ronald Smith's story of the figure in his horse pasture. Thus, the doctrinal didacticism of earlier legends—of Snow's poem, of Joseph Fielding Smith's instruction to his brother—is downplayed, and Cain himself becomes less a supernatural fiend and more the stock monster of any number of campfire tales—in short, less a cursed soul and more Bigfoot.

Other recent tales further this transition by deemphasizing or distorting older theological issues connected to Cain. One 1998 story rejects the traditional curse entirely, instead explaining that Bigfoot was an "Indian spirit that turns into a hairy Cain-like creature." Another collected in 1990 mentions the curse but muddles the racial issue, stating that the informant "learned in Seminary that [Cain] was cursed to not die and walk the Earth all Mongoloidy." Notably, neither of these stories associates Cain with Africans nor ascribe to him the motive of overthrowing the Church. One 1997 story illustrates the new trends of Cain's racial identity with noteworthy precision: "A long time ago, maybe Brigham Young's day, he [presumably Young] was in a carriage when he saw a big, I mean huge black man. Not like we think of a black man, but his whole countenance was dark and black." This story seeks to preserve the original flavor of the Cain legend but explicitly disassociates Cain from black human beings. Clearly, the underlying concepts of the story have altered. In addition, none of the more recent stories uses any racial language to describe Cain. In short, the theological issues of race and damnation have been downplayed recently in favor of the legend's "fright" potential and its association with traditional campfire fare like "Indian spirits."[43]

A 1997 story provides us with a fascinating retelling of David Patten's encounter with Cain that demonstrates what the Cain cycle has turned into. The teller announces that he read this story in Kimball's *Miracle of Forgiveness* but goes on to tell a very different account: "During the early days of the Church in New York state, a brother was riding his horse through a thicket of wood when he came across an extremely tall, frighteningly hairy creature roaming through the trees. This monster-like form stopped the man and told him that he was Cain. . . . Because of this spotting, many members of

[43]"A Night at the Canyon"; Folk Collection 8a, Group 2; Box 12, 18.1.21.1, Fife Archives; "Supernatural Religious Legends," 1.1.4.3.15.1, Wilson Folklore Archives, Perry Special Collections.

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the Church believe that Cain is Bigfoot."[44] While this story and Patten's affirm several similar details about Cain (height and hairiness), the modern version replaces Patten's description of dark skin with "frighteningly" and "monster-like." In addition, this story omits Cain's description of his diabolic mission and Patten's exorcism. In short, racial and religious issues at stake disappear. The tale has become a horror story whose point is identifying Cain with the modern monster Bigfoot.

One modern story seems to buck all these trends. It was collected in 1983 from, the collector writes, "my seminary teacher," and by implication was the teacher's experience. The student heard it "in first person" (but retells it in the third). The teacher's point was "to teach us not to play with Ouiga [sic] boards."

> A group of teenaged boys were playing with a ouija [sic] board. They were asking simple, fun questions. One of them had the idea to take the board to the graveyard. . . . After a while they started asking deeper questions. One boy asked, "Can we see Cane [sic]?" The ouija board answered yes. All of a sudden a huge black man was standing on the hill. . . . Everyone was scared, so they ran to their car with the black man in hot persuit [sic]. The guy driving screeched away, and then drove everybody home. . . . The next morning he had decided that it never happened, but at breakfast his mom asked why he kept coming and going the night before.[45]

This story, collected five years after the end of the priesthood ban, seems to violate the general trend of recent times. It identifies Cain as a "black man" and has definite overtones of the supernatural, including the graveyard setting and the Ouija board. However, the teller was a seminary teacher in 1983, a generation older than the student who recorded it. An experience date of perhaps the 1950s may explain the use of "black" rather than "dark" or "hairy."

In other ways, however, this tale corresponds to other recent stories in its shift away from the nineteenth-century understanding of supernatural evil. Though the story has an unusual stress on the supernatural, like contemporary stories, Cain never speaks. He simply chases people. No one tries to invoke priesthood. Further, Cain is nei-

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[44]"Supernatural Religious Legends," 1.1.4.3.11.1, Wilson Archives, Perry Special Collections.

[45]Folk Collection 8a, Group 7: Box 3, 2.4.1.5.20.1, Fife Archives.

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ther the focus nor the source of the supernatural in the story; the Ouija board is. Although elements of evil are present, they are very different from the nineteenth-century versions. Cain does not appear as a supernatural persecutor in his own right. The boys do not represent the kingdom of God, and Cain does not challenge the Church. Indeed, a crucial element in the story is that the boys are engaged in trivial, reckless entertainment, nothing as laudable as missionary work. Cain enters the story as a warning against or even punishment for wrong action. He is summoned by human wickedness, rather than appearing independently. It is important to notice the buildup of the story; the progression from "simple, fun questions" to the graveyard, to the fateful question, "Can we see Cane?" What is being dramatized here is the slippery slope, a classic rhetorical device in Mormonism used to warn against sin. A series of poor decisions, not Satanic power, leads to this encounter. Therefore, evil is internalized, understood as human error rather than as an external force in its own right. It is not Pauline in the way that nineteenth-century Mormon evil was. This story, then, alters the nineteenth-century Cain to fit twentieth-century theology just as surely as transforming him into the mindless, brutish Bigfoot did.

Mormon historians have noted the diminished role of overt manifestations of the supernatural since the nineteenth century; Thomas Alexander's discussion of the "routinization" of "gifts of the Spirit" and the discouragement of their exercise outside the lines of Church structure, is a prime example.[46] The transformation of Cain into Bigfoot illustrates this trend. Modern tales do not repudiate the supernatural overtones of the nineteenth-century Cain. Even made over as Bigfoot, Cain is still presumed to be real and still alive—just as Genesis describes. This status is similar to the preservation of the power of gifts of the Spirit, such as healing—power that any Mormon would strongly defend, despite the removal of the Pentecostal-style spontaneity that once accompanied them.

While the supernatural is preserved, however, its borders are reframed and reduced. In the new Cain, the power of the malevolent supernatural is severely curtailed, not only through the fading of overt demonology from Cain's story, but also through severing his

[46]Thomas Alexander, *Mormonism in Transition: A History of the Latter-day Saints, 1890–1930* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 290–98.

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link with Africa. Both developments reflect a new, largely intangible, conception of evil. No longer can it be located on a specific continent or its residue be seen on skin; similarly, no longer are Saints warned of, in Brigham Young's words, demons "visiting the human family with various manifestations." Importantly, however, the basic supernatural premise of Cain's existence, and the network of religious assumptions that rest upon it—that of the validity of the Bible, the literalness of Adam and Eve, and the existence of an interventionist God—remain unquestioned. If Cain is removed as one of these demonic manifestations—if he is no longer representative of a material, aggressive, Pauline conception of evil—his transformation into Bigfoot allows the supernaturalism of his story to persevere and that of Mormonism to be affirmed.

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